DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 329 831 CG 023 200

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TITLE Long-Term Effects of Divorce: Interpersonal and Cognitive Traits in Men.
PUB DATE Aug 90
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (98th, Boston, MA, August 10-14, 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Children; *Cognitive Style; *Divorce; Emotional Adjustment; Family Environment; *Interpersonal Competence; *Intimacy; *Sons

ABSTRACT

Much research has attempted to understand the short-term effects of divorce, and it has shown overall harmful effects during childhood. The long-range implications, or effects in adulthood, have largely been ignored. This correlational study sought to understand the long-term effects of divorce by identifying interpersonal traits, intimacy, and cognitions which characterize the male adult child of divorce (ACDs). The subjects were 151 men from the general population, one-half of whom were ACDs, while one-half were from an intact family. The subjects completed questionnaires on intimacy, injunctions (as a cognition), and interpersonal behavior. Numerous background data were examined. Analysis of the data revealed interpersonal traits and injunctions against closeness to statistically differentiate male ACDs from men from intact families. Male ACDs had a hostile guarded-rescuer interpersonal style. Traits associated with divorce in men included self-effacement, distrustfulness and submissiveness. Support was found for interpersonal theory, redecision theory, and the cognitive behavioral model of marital instability. (LLL)

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Presented at the 98th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association meeting, Boston, Mass., August, 1990.

LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF DIVORCE: INTERPERSONAL AND COGNITIVE TRAITS IN MEN

Silvio Silvestri, PhD.

Abstract

This correlational study sought to understand the long-term effects of divorce by identifying interpersonal traits, intimacy and cognitions which characterize the male adult child of divorce (ACDs). The subjects were 151 men from the general population, half of whom were ACDs while half from an intact family. They completed questionnaires on intimacy, injunctions and interpersonal behavior. Numerous background data were examined.

Analysis of the data revealed interpersonal traits and injunctions against closeness to statistically differentiate male ACDs from men from intact families. Male ACDs had a hostile guarded-rescuer interpersonal style. Traits associated with divorce in men included self-effacement, distrustfulness, and submissiveness. Support was found for interpersonal theory, redecision theory and the cognitive behavioral model of marital instability.

THE PROBLEM

Much research has attempted to understand the short-term effects of divorce, and it has shown overall harmful effects during childhood. The long-range implications, or effects in adulthood, have largely been ignored.

The scant research available on adult children from divorce (ACDs) indicated the presence of long-term effects of divorce, with men suffering more effects than women. Male ACDs are lower in overall psychological adjustment, with a pronounced impact on social behavior, including higher divorce rates, higher anxiety, and role under-investment in the family of procreation (Kulka and Weingarten, 1979). Below is a summary of past research.

***Summary of past research on Male ACDs.**

Characterized as likely to:

1. Handle irreconcilable differences by divorce (Kulka & Weingarten,

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1979);Greenberg & Nay, 1982).

2. Avoid marital commitments (Kulka & Weingarten, 1979); Covell & Turnbull, 1983).

3. Experience problems in marriage and family (Kulka & Weingarten, 1979).

4. Date more actively but be less satisfied (Booth, et at., 1984; Hepworth, et al, 1984).

5. Be socially active (Tierney, 1986).

6. Rely more frequently on professional help (Kulka & Weingarten, 1979).

7. Trust less and be more anxious (Schooler, 1972).

8. Have weak investment in family roles (Kulka & Weingarten, 1979).

9. Exhibit more dependency yet perceive their parents negatively (Cooney, 1978; Fine et al., 1983).

10. Be less confident in social situations (Covell & Turnbull, 1983).

11. Lack conflict resolution skills in marital functioning (Greenberg & Nay, 1983).

12. Interpersonally and emotionally constricted (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989).

Theorists Pope and Meuller (1976) suggested marital instability, the increased likelihood of divorce, was transferred to offspring from parents, but were unclear on the mechanics of this process. Earlier research by Greenberg and Nay (1983) explored cognitions in the form of attitudes and a small segment of interpersonal behavior with a college population, but with little success.

Various improvements in design were thought to improve the outcome, such as selecting an older subject population, using injunctions instead of attitudes (Goulding & Goulding, 1979), and studying the

entire range of interpersonal behavior based on the circumplex model of interpersonal behavior (Leary, 1957). In sum, this study sought to better understand the mechanics of the transmission process and the long term effects of divorce by determining whether three variables were responsible for marital instability: interpersonal behavior, intimacy, and cognitions or injunctions. See figure 1 for the theoretical base and corresponding variables for study.

New Theoretical Model

Selection of Variables With Corresponding Theory

A. Cognitive Behavioral Model

1. Interpersonal theory --->Interpersonal Behavior
2. Redecision Theory----> Injunctions as a cognition

B. Developmental Theory--->Intimacy

Figure 1

Numerous background variables and post-divorce family situational factors were selected including SES, sex of custodial parent, presence of step-families, level of parental conflict, and quality of non-custodial parent relationship.

METHOD

The study used 151 married and divorced male adults, aged 21-42 years, from the general population who filled out the Injunction Inventory, the Waring Intimacy Questionnaire, and Leary's Interpersonal Checklist. The 155 questionnaire items took between 20-35 minutes to complete. This was a correlational design and ANCOVA, MANCOVA, and Chi Square statistical techniques were used to analyze the data. Table 1 describes the independent and dependent variables.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Table 1

Relationship Between Divorced and Married Male ACDs and ACIs on Interpersonal Behavior, Intimacy, and Cognitions

Early Family Structure	Interpersonal Behavior	Intimacy	Cognitions
Divorced ACDs			
Married ACDs			
Divorced ACIs			
Married ACIs			

Independent Variables : The main independent variable was early family structure, divorced family (ACDs) versus intact family (ACIs) of origin. A second independent variable was marital status, married versus divorced.

Dependent Variables : The dependent variables included injunctions, interpersonal behavior, and intimacy.

Background Variables : These included six demographic characteristics and four post-divorce family characteristics. Level of parental conflict and quality of non-custodial relationship were seen to influence the dependent variables.

Hypotheses

1. A significant difference exists among divorced ACDs, married ACDs, divorced ACIs and married ACIs on the eight interpersonal octants of the Interpersonal Checklist (ICL).

a. Divorced ACDs are less affectionate than married ACDs, divorced ACIs or married ACIs, based on scores of

the ICL.

b. Divorced ACDs are less dominant than married ACDs, divorced or married ACIs, based on scores of the ICL.

c. Divorced ACDs rate higher in proportion of maladjustment than married ACDs, divorced and married ACIs, based on scores of the ICL.

2. Divorced ACDs have significantly lower intimacy scores than married ACDs, divorced and married ACIs, based on scores of the Waring Intimacy Questionnaire, (WIQ).

3. Divorced ACDs rate significantly higher on the injunction against closeness than do married ACDs, divorced ACIs and married ACIs, based on scores from the "Don't be close" subscale of the Injunction Inventory.

RESULTS

Multiple and two-way analysis of covariance on the data revealed little interaction between early family structure and marital status, but significant results were found indicating differences between men from divorced families and men from intact families. Male ACDs had a higher frequency of "Don't be close" injunctions, a guarded-hostile-rescuer interpersonal style. Intimacy did not differ between the groups.

In addition, previously divorced men were over-generous or self-deprecating interpersonally compared with currently married men. Other than age, few background factors related to the dependent variables. These findings supported a cognitive behavioral explanation of martial instability, suggesting the transmission process occurred through injunctions against close-

ness and distancing interpersonal behavior. Also, Redecision theory (Goulding & Goulding, 1979) is seen as a valid explanation of the transmission theory (Meuller and Pope, 1977) of marital instability.

FINDINGS

Traits found in the current study associated with divorced men (both ACDs and ACIs):

1. Maladjustment in modesty (too self-critical).
2. Submissiveness (docile, dependent, passive behaviors)
3. Distrustfullness.
4. Affection

Traits found in the current study associated with Male ACDs (both married and divorced):

1. Maladjustment in responsibility
2. Innability to self evaluate.
3. Uncooperativeness
4. Hostility

*Guarded/hostile/rescuer profile.

Factors contributing to marital instability:

1. A "Don't be close" injunction (Cognitions)
2. Distrustful and uncooperative interpersonal behavior.
4. Maladjustment in responsibility (caretaking-too responsible).
5. Imbalanced in modesty (too self-critical or not self-critical enough).

CONCLUSIONS

Unlike Greenberg and Nay (1983) who concluded few differences existed between college aged ACDs and ACIs in their interper-

sonal behavior and cognitions, the current study offers evidence demonstrating differences in an older population; that of adulthood. Developmental forces which confront the task of intimacy may be central to uncovering behavior and cognitions which are not present in a younger aged population (18.4 years was the average age of Greenberg and Nay's study). Therefore, it is concluded that a parental divorce has long-term implications--a notion recently offered by Wallerstein (1985c;1989) who described previous research efforts as focusing on effects in children one to five years after a divorce and whose long-range implications have been poorly understood.

The long-term effects from divorced families found in this study involve interpersonal behavior and cognitions against closeness. Intimacy was not supported as a factor of marital instability. Comparative interpersonal profiles showed male ACDs to be less cooperative, more hostile, less prone to self-evaluation, and maladjusted in responsibility. This pattern is described as guarded-hostile-rescuing and may be the behavioral consequence of an underlying cognition against closeness. The higher frequency of a "Don't be close" injunction coupled with guarded interpersonal behavior may be the mechanics of the transmission process described by Pope and Mueller (1976, 1977) and could help to explain the underinvestment in family roles found by Kulka and Weingarten (1979).

A central focus of this study was to discover factors of marital instability, and it was concluded that a guarded hostile interpersonal style and a "Don't be close" injunction may contribute to the higher divorce rate found by previous researchers

(Glenn & Shelton, 1983; Wallerstein, 1985b; Kulka & Weingarten, 1979) and unsatisfactory or aberrant dating experiences found by others (Booth et al., 1984; Hepworth et al., 1984).

As evident in this study, differences may be small when ACDs are compared with ACIs. The global measure for adjustment in this study was the test for maladjustment. One out of eight quadrants was found to be significantly different in maladjustment for ACDs, while one out of eight quadrants was found to be significantly maladjusted for divorced men. These are small levels of maladjustment in interpersonal behavior between divorced and married men and ACDs and ACIs. This conclusion is contrary to several past studies on adjustment which found high levels of maladjustment (Glenn & Kramer, 1985), or no foundation for maladjustment in ACDs, (Raschke, 1977) while consonant with another study that also found small levels of maladjustment (Kulka & Weingarten, 1979). Athough the levels may be small, they are important enough to create significantly higher levels of divorce in ACDs and divorce itself in men who exhibit these traits.

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